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January 15, 2004

Representative John Rogers, Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 237

Senator Therese Murray, Chairperson
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212

Representative William Greene, House Chair
Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 473-F

Senator Pamela Resor, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture
State House, Room 410
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairpersons Rogers, Murray, Greene and Resor:

Attached please find our interim report pursuant to section 629 of chapter 26 of the acts of 2003, which calls for the commissioner of conservation and recreation, in consultation with the division of capital asset management and maintenance, to "devise a long term plan for improving the quality of the services offered in recreational facilities in the commonwealth".

Our primary focus in this report has been to examine in depth a central charge of the General Court in directing us to undertake this planning process, e.g. "the feasibility and merits of executing long term lease arrangements" for the skating rinks under the control of the metropolitan district commission as of June 30, 2003.

Beginning in early August, 2003, we assembled an internal rinks team, with key support from the Division of Capital Asset Management, to assess the merits and feasibility of long term leasing for these rinks and to coordinate overall rinks partnership efforts. Over the course of the fall the team held weekly planning meetings, as well as three public informational meetings (November 20 in Canton, December 16 in Lynn, and December 18 in Charlestown) for representatives of user organizations affiliated with the (formerly) MDC rinks.

As you will see detailed and thoroughly documented in the following pages, our analysis leads to the conclusion that it is not only feasible but highly desirable to enter into long term leasing arrangements for the operations, maintenance and capital improvements for the (formerly) MDC rinks. We base these findings in large measure on the benefits to rink users and Commonwealth taxpayers that have been derived from the long term leasing of (formerly) DEM rinks, including longer skating seasons and greatly improved facilities at affordable rates. Long term leasing under the DEM model has also resulted in the savings to taxpayers of tens of millions of dollars in avoided capital expenditures, and promises comparable capital savings for the (formerly) MDC rinks over the next 25 years.

We wish to thank you and your colleagues for the opportunity to work collaboratively with the General Court on this important public policy issue. We also wish to thank you for the generous time extension granted for our submittal of this report.

We would very much welcome the opportunity in a supplemental report to examine in greater depth the General Court's broader charge to us of evaluating long term leasing for the Commonwealth's public golf courses and devising a long term plan for improving all of the Commonwealth's public recreational facilities. To that end we are currently engaged with DCAM in developing a comprehensive baseline assessment of the agency's facilities, assets, programs and services.

For the Commonwealth's public skating facilities, we strongly believe that long term leasing, modeled on the principles of the successful DEM program and tailored to best ensure the long term viability of each MDC rink, is the optimal way for improving the quality of the recreational services that we provide to our fellow citizens. Skaters young and old who use the state's leased rinks from Peabody to Holyoke are now enjoying clean, comfortable and well-maintained facilities, with longer skating seasons and affordable user fees, all guaranteed for the long term. Our goal is to provide the skaters who depend on the (formerly) MDC rinks with these same benefits, now and well into the future.

We hope that you will agree with our findings, and that you will implement our recommendations as expeditiously as possible. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues in this important endeavor.

Regards,

Ellen Roy Herzfelder
Secretary

Katherine F. Abbott
Commissioner